Focusing on Malnutrition as a Tool in Elderly

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Malnutrition is not naturally associated to ageing, elderly population are at risk for malnutrition because of physiological, social, psychological, dietary and environmental risk factors. In this age group, the progression to malnutrition is very fast and usually undetected. In elderly population, malnutrition is associated with different complication including morbidity and mortality. Due to above reason we focused on this age group and their nutritional status screening and assessment. In this age group, there are different tools used to screen malnutrition. Among this, we found MNA which was used worldwide and validated in different part of world but not yet in Ethiopia.

Valid tool that measures what it is proposed to measure. Evaluating the validity of screening tool in the population for which it is intended to ensure the tool is fit for purpose. Valid tools ensure the accurate detection of those at risk of malnutrition and facilitate nutritional intervention. The MNA has been validated in many research studies with elderly people in different setting. Even though this tool is validated and used in different country, it is not readily applicable to other country. This because of population characteristic is varying from country to country especially in terms of anthropometric measurement and nutritional characteristics. However, it has not been validated for Ethiopian elders. Therefore, this study was done to validate MNA short form using MNA long-form as a golden standard in Ethiopia.

It is the only nutritional screening and assessment tool that incorporates functionality, mobility, depression. Moreover, it is reliable, inexpensive, does not require laboratory investigation and used in all setting. It also detects risks of malnutrition before severe change in individuals body weight or serum albumin occurs. Additionally, its lowest score is predictive for mortality and longtime stay in hospital. Limitation of this tool is the accuracy of measurement of height and weight to calculate BMI in bedridden participants. Additionally lack of familiarity with measuring calf circumference among health professional.

Currently the elderly population is gradually increasing in this 21st century with the double rate 11.1% to 22%. Because of this, time-saving, inexpensive, fast, and simple nutritional screening and assessment tools are very crucial to use at any level of nutritional screen and assessment. Therefore, MNA is a useful screening and valid tool but the characteristics of the population must considered to make nutritional status screening and assessment based on this tool. This tool saves the life, time, and cost of health expenditure. It saves the life by early detection of at risk for malnutrition, thus averting malnutrition and its consequences. In turn, it will improve the quality of life for the elderly population. In addition, it does not require laboratory investigation, so it is recommended to be used in resource scarce area and for research setting.

Validating this tool in our context has paramount importance. This study result give the direction for governments, program managers, and policymakers in terms of increase their awareness to give priority and attention to screening and assessment nutritional status of the elder population, since it is applied in short, easy, and at least cost. Also, this study is a helpful scientific researcher using a result of this study as the baseline.